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ABSTRACT

Understanding characteristics specific to alcoholics' marriages could help therapists to more effectively address the needs of alcoholic clients. To identify some of these characteristics, 26 married couples with an alcoholic husband (ALC) were compared with 26 maritally-conficted (MC) and 26 nonconflicted (NC) couples without alcohol problems. All couples completed the Marital Adjustment Test, the Marital Status Inventory, and the Areas of Change Questionnaire. Couples were videotaped for 10 minutes while discussing a current marriage problem, and tapes were rated using the Marital Interaction Coding System. In addition, MC couples completed a Problem Areas Questionnaire; ALC husbands completed the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) and a portable breath test; and NC wives completed the MAST about the husband's drinking to assure that the husband had no drinking problem. The results indicated that ALC couples resembled MC couples and both showed greater relationship distress than NC couples in the areas of marital stability, change desired, and percent of positive communication behaviors. Although findings were not very supportive of the prediction that ALC couples would show characteristics unique to ALC's, ALC husbands reported fewer desires for change in the relationship, greater marital satisfaction, and less awareness of partner-desired changes than did ALC wives, suggesting that the ALC husbands held positively-biased perceptions of their marriages. (Three data tables and four figures are included.) (NRB)

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Marital Relationships of Alcoholic, Conflicted, and Nonconflicted Couples

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ABSTRACT

Twenty-six married couples with an alcoholic husband (ALC) were compared with 26 maritally-conflicted (MC) and 26 nonconflicted (NC) couples without alcohol problems on (a) self-report marital measures and (b) observational measures of marital communication while couples discussed a current marital problem. It was predicted that ALC would resemble MC and both would show greater relationship distress than NC couples on measures that generally had discriminated MC and NC couples in prior studies. This prediction was supported for marital stability, change desired, and percent of positive communication behaviors. A second prediction was that ALC couples would show certain characteristics thought to be unique to ALC to a greater extent than both MC and NC couples. No support was found for the second prediction which concerned struggles for control, a pattern of wife dominance, a responsibility-avoiding style of communication by the ALC husband, and impaired perceptual accuracy of spouses in ALC couples. Despite the general pattern of commonality between ALC and MC couples and not much that was specific to ALC couples, unpredicted interactions on three of the four self-report measures proved interesting. ALC husbands reported fewer desires for change in the relationship, greater marital satisfaction, and less awareness of partner-desired changes than ALC wives did; on the latter two measures ALC husbands also reported less distress than MC husbands. Possible explanations for the alcoholic's positively biased perception of his marriage and clinical implications are discussed.

Marital Relationships of Alcoholic, Conflicted, and Nonconflicted Couples

Marital therapy is being used increasingly to alleviate the suffering of couples troubled by relationship conflict and alcoholic drinking. In recognition of this trend, the Second Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health (Keller, 1974) called marital and family treatment approaches "the most notable current advance in the area of psychotherapy of alcoholism." Studies of behavioral marital therapy with alcoholic couples (e.g., O'Farrell, Cutter & Floyd, 1985) use methods developed originally for use with nonalcoholic maritally conflicted couples to remedy deficits in relationship behavior identified in studies comparing conflicted and nonalcoholic nonconflicted couples. This practice is based on the assumption that alcoholic couples resemble other couples experiencing marital distress. The present study evaluates this assumption.

Understanding any characteristics that are specific to alcoholics' marriages could help design marriage therapy to fit the specific needs of alcoholics rather than the current practice of applying the methods developed and used with nonalcoholics (O'Farrell, in press). Unfortunately, surprisingly little is known about any characteristics that are unique to the marriages of alcoholics. Many studies have been limited to clinical impression or retrospective unstandardized interviews (Paolino & McCrady, 1977), and only a few studies have included a comparison group of nonalcoholic couples. These latter studies have demonstrated a number of differences between alcoholic and "normal" couples that were often incorrectly interpreted as being unique to alcoholics, given the lack of a maritally (or psychiatrically) disturbed nonalcoholic control group (Jacob, Favorini, Meisel, & Anderson, 1978). In the only prior study of its kind, Billings and colleagues (Billings, Kessler, Gomberg, &

Weiner, 1979) studied the marital interactions of 12 alcoholics and their wives, 12 maritally conflicted and 12 nonconflicted, nonalcoholic couples. Results showed that on most measures alcoholic couples and maritally conflicted nonalcoholic couples did not differ while both groups made fewer rational and problem solving statements and more negative and hostile communications than nonconflicted, nonalcoholic couples.

The present study of alcoholic, maritally conflicted, and nonconflicted couples extended the Billings et al study by using (a) a larger sample, (b) both self-report and observational measures, and (c) marital interactions about current relationship problems rather than contrived conflict vignettes or interactional games. The present study addressed two sets of predictions. First, couples with an alcoholic husband (ALC) will resemble maritally conflicted nonalcoholic couples (MC) and both ALC and MC couples will show greater relationship distress than nonconflicted couples (NC) on the following aspects of marital relationships which have been shown in previous studies among nonalcoholics to discriminate between MC and NC couples: positive, negative, and problem-solving communication; extent of desired relationship change; and marital satisfaction and stability. A second set of predictions, based on clinical conceptualizations and prior research comparing ALC with normal couples, indicates that ALC couples will show to a greater extent than either MC or NC couples the following characteristics thought to be unique to alcoholics and their wives: (a) inaccurate interpersonal perceptions (Gynther & Brilliant, 1967; Mitchell, 1959); (b) intense struggles for dominance and control and a pattern of wife dominance in the ALC couples that does not exist in MC and NC couples (Becker & Miller, 1976; Drewery & Rae, 1969; Duhamel, 1971; Mitchell, 1959); and (c) a responsibility-avoiding style of communication by the ALC husband that exceeds both ALC wives and the MC and NC husbands (Cutler, 1976; Gorad, 1971).

Method

Subjects

Married couples, with both spouses less than 60 years of age who were living together and had been married at least one year, were eligible for the study if neither spouse had a history of hospitalization for emotional problems. In addition, to insure sample homogeneity, only couples who were white were included; if either or both spouses were black, hispanic, or oriental the couple was excluded from the study. Twenty-six couples were selected for each of the three groups under study based on the following criteria.

Alcoholic couples (ALC). (a) These couples, in which the husband was being treated for alcoholism, completed an initial evaluation for possible marital therapy in the Counseling for Alcoholic Marriages Program directed by the first author at the Veterans Administration (VA) Medical Center in Brockton, Massachusetts. (b) Husband was an alcoholic as evidenced by receiving alcoholism treatment at the VA's inpatient or outpatient alcoholism program and by his score on the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) [M = 36.56, $S.D.$ = 7.38, range = 20-48; all scores were well above seven, a conservative indicator of alcoholism (Selzer, 1971)]. (c) Both spouses agreed in separate interviews that the wife was not an alcoholic and that her drinking was not a problem in the marriage. Further, the husband did not request a decrease in the wife's drinking on the Areas of Change (AC) Questionnaire.

Maritally conflicted couples (MC). (a) These couples completed an initial evaluation for possible marital therapy in the Family Mental Health Program directed by the second author at the VA Medical Center in San Diego, California. (b) Each spouse received a score of less than 100 on The Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) (Locke and Wallace, 1959), indicating marital dissatisfaction. (c) Neither spouse was an alcoholic as indicated by absence from the following

sources of any mention of either spouse having a drinking problem or of either spouse's drinking contributing to relationship problems: the husband's medical record at the VA, each spouse's comments to therapists during the initial evaluation, each spouse's response to a Problem Areas Questionnaire on which each spouse listed individual and couple problems. In addition, neither spouse requested a decrease in the partner's drinking on the AC.

Nonconflicted couples (NC). (a) These couples answered advertisements for happily married couples placed in a newspaper serving Brockton, Massachusetts and surrounding towns. (b) Both spouses received a score greater than 100 on the MAT, indicating general marital satisfaction, and reported that they were happily married. (c) No history of marital therapy was reported and neither spouse was currently involved in psychotherapy. (d) Neither spouse was an alcoholic. Both spouses completed the MAST about the husband's drinking and none of the husbands received a score over three, indicating the absence of problems with drinking (Selzer, 1971). Husbands and wives in all NC couples denied that they or their spouse had a drinking problem or that drinking had caused conflict in their relationship. Finally, neither spouse requested a decrease in the partner's drinking on the AC.

Insert Table 1 about here

Subject characteristics shown in Table 1 were analyzed for possible group differences using one-way analyses of variance. The three groups of couples did not differ significantly on any of these demographic characteristics. Additional descriptive information about the alcoholic husbands of the ALC couples showed that the husbands' drinking had been a problem for many years (M = 10.89 years, $S.D.$ = 8.14), had resulted in alcohol-related hospitalizations

(M = 3.84, S.D. = 9.09) and arrests (M = 2.42, S.D. = 2.55), and had led to withdrawal symptoms in 92% (24/26) of the alcoholics.

Measures

Self-report marriage questionnaires. The Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) (Locke & Wallace, 1959) was used to measure overall marital satisfaction. The MAT is a reliable and valid measure on which each spouse rates overall marriage happiness and degree of agreement on seven areas of marital life, (e.g. finances, in-laws) and answers six additional questions on marital satisfaction.

Two measures were taken from the Areas of Change Questionnaire (AC) (Margolin, Talovic, & Weinstein, 1983). The AC consists of two parts that contain identical listings of 34 items reflecting specific issues for marital change. Part I instructs the respondent to indicate whether she or he wants the partner to increase, decrease, or not change the rate of each behavior, and Part II asks the respondent to indicate whether an increase, decrease, or no change would be pleasing to the partner. Desired change is indicated in both sections along a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "much less" (-3) to "no change" (0) to "much more" (+ 3). The first AC index used in the present study, AC Total Change Desired, was the total change each spouse desired in the relationship calculated by summing the absolute Likert values for the 34 items of Part 1 of the AC.

The second AC measure used was the ratio of AC Agreements ÷ Disagreements, an index of perceptual accuracy. This index was used to measure the extent to which each spouse understood what behaviors the partner wanted him/her to change and the direction of change desired. Obtaining this perceptual accuracy index requires matching Part I for partner A with Part II from partner B, or vice versa, matching Part I from partner B with Part II from partner A. Agree-

ments are scored when partner A wants change on a specific item and partner B is not only aware of that specific change but correctly indicates the desired direction of that change. Disagreements are scored under two types of conditions. It is a disagreement if partner A wants change but partner B thinks no change is desired, or, alternatively, partner A does not want change but partner B believes that change is indeed desired. Disagreements are also scored if there is a misperception regarding the direction of the desired change.

Marital stability was measured with the Marital Status Inventory (MSI) (Weiss & Cerreto, 1980), a 14-item Guttman scale of divorce potential which assesses thoughts, plans, and actions concerned with separation or divorce. The MSI has adequate Guttman scale coefficients (reproducibility = .90, scalability = .87) and discriminates distressed from nondistressed couples (Weiss & Cerreto, 1980). In the present study, the MSI was included in addition to the MAT and AC because marital adjustment and stability are two dimensions of a marriage relationship that, although correlated, are conceptually and empirically nonoverlapping. Long-term stable marriages that are quite unhappy and poorly adjusted are a good illustration of this. In addition, a measure of stability seemed particularly important for alcoholics' marriages in which separation is a frequent response to drinking and drinking-related stressors (O'Farrell, Harrison, & Cutter, 1981).

Observational data on marital communication. Each couple was videotaped for 10 minutes while the husband and wife discussed a current marriage problem area after being instructed to act as they would normally and to problem solve as best they could. Trained raters under Robert Weiss' direction at the University of Oregon Marital Studies Program coded these videotaped interaction samples using the Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS) (Weiss, Hops, & Patterson, 1973). Coders were not informed of the experimental condition of

the couples or the hypotheses of the study. Half of the 10-minute interaction samples, randomly chosen from the total number of 10-minute segments, were rated by two coders. Interrater reliability was calculated as agreements divided by agreements plus disagreements; this quotient was then multiplied by 100. Any interaction sample that did not reach the criterion of 70% agreement was recoded by another coder pair. The MICS consists of 30 specific behavioral codes that were grouped into five summary categories as recommended by Wieder and Weiss (1980): (1) positive verbal, (2) positive nonverbal, (3) negative verbal, (4) negative nonverbal, and (5) problem-solving. In the present study, the number of interactional behaviors in each summary category was summed, divided by the total number of interactional behaviors coded and multiplied by 100 to obtain the percent of behaviors in the interaction accounted for by each category.

In addition to the five MICS summary categories, certain specific MICS behavior codes, each of which was expessed as the percentage of the total behaviors coded, were used to examine dominance patterns and responsibility-avoiding communication since these two constructs have been important in the literature on alcoholics' marriages. The extent and outcome of interruptions were used, respectively, to operationalize the constructs of struggles for control and dominance patterns. Specifically the number of interruptions was used as an index of extent of struggles for control of the conversation and more broadly of the relationship. The extent of dominance for a given spouse was determined by taking the percent of all interruptions that occurred in which the spouse controlled the conversation either by: (a) "successfully" interrupting his/her partner to produce a "floor switch" in which the partner stopped talking and the spouse continued talking; or (b) when interrupted by the partner, not allowing the floor to switch to the partner. The construct of

responsibility-avoiding style of communication was measured by the sum of two individual MICS codes labeled "deny responsibility" (DR) and "excuse" (EX). The MICS manual (Weiss, 1976) defines these two behavior codes as follows: (a) "DR--Deny Responsibility: Any statement which explicitly denies that the respondent should or does bear any responsibility for a particular situation. EX is an attempt to wriggle out of responsibility, while DR is an active denial. (b) EX--Excuse: An attempt to escape accepting responsibility for an action or situation by invoking implausible explanations or spurious reasons. This category requires judgment as to whether the rationale is plausible and/or reasonable. A person may use an EX to excuse either his own behavior or the shortcomings of another." The MICS code "accept responsibility" (AR) was used as an index of responsibility-accepting communication. AR is defined as "An explicit statement of responsibility for an action or the existence of a situation. Usually preceded by PD (Problem Description) or a change response [CR (Criticism) or RC (Request Change)]. Examples: "Yes, that's my fault" or "I suppose I'm the one who's responsible for that."

Procedure

The ALC and MC couples completed the MAT, MSI, and AC questionnaires and the videotaped sample of communication while discussing a current marriage problem area for 10 minutes as part of an initial evaluation for couples counselling for marital problems. The MC couples also completed a Problem Areas Questionnaire in which each spouse listed the four most significant relationship problem areas and the four most significant individual problem areas being experienced at the time of the evaluation. For the ALC couples, the husbands completed the MAST and took a portable breath test with the Mobatt (Sobell & Sobell, 1975); the latter was done to insure their sobriety during the evaluation and is a common practice in research and clinical alcoholism settings.

For both groups of couples one of the authors (or mental health professionals or doctoral candidate psychology interns under the supervision of one of the authors) conducted the couple evaluation and met with the couple at the outset to gather intake information and informed consent, and to explain the evaluation. The evaluation concluded with a meeting with the couple to discuss the information obtained and to plan the couple's counselling.

The NC couples who responded to newspaper ads for happily married couples and met the criteria for participation completed informed consent procedures. The study was described as an attempt to understand what kinds of problems are experienced by different types of couples and how couples communicate about their problems. The NC couples completed the data collection procedures common to the two other groups of couples. In addition, the wife completed the MAST about the husband's drinking to make sure that neither spouse thought the husband had a drinking problem. Finally, a debriefing session was conducted with each NC couple to discuss the information obtained from them and any reactions to the procedures.

Results

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, the 3 Groups (ALC, MC, NC) by 2 Sexes (husband and wife -- a repeated dimension) MANOVA's conducted respectively on the four self-report and the nine MICS measures revealed significant multivariate Group, Sex, and Group by Sex effects. The results from the univariate ANOVA's and tests following up significant effects are presented separately for the two types of measures below. Following Winer (1971), significant univariate Group effects (for variables with other effects not significant) were followed up by Newman-Keuls comparisons of the means for the ALC, MC, and NC groups. When both Group and Sex (but not the interaction) effects were significant, the mean comparisons among the three groups were performed separately for husbands and

for wives. For variables with a significant Group by Sex interaction, tests of simple main effects were conducted (a) for Groups separately for husbands and for wives with significant findings being followed up by Newman-Keuls comparisons among means and (b) for Sex within each of the three groups. Only significant differences are presented.

Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here.

Self-Report Marital Relationship Measures

Marital adjustment and stability and desired change. The significant interaction for MAT is depicted in Figure 1. MAT scores differed across groups for husbands [F (2,78) = 51.99, $p < .01$] and for wives [F (2,78) = 61.91, $p < .001$]. Newman-Keuls showed that both husbands and wives in the ALC and MC couples reported greater marital distress than their counterparts in the NC couples. Comparing ALC and MC couples, wives did not differ while ALC husbands reported less marital distress than MC husbands. Comparing husbands and wives within each type of couple revealed no differences in the MC couples, that husbands reported less marital distress than their wives in ALC couples [F (1,25) = 5.71, $p < .05$], while wives reported less distress than husbands in NC couples [F (1,25) = 5.18, $p < .05$].

Insert Figure 1 about here.

For MSI, wives, irrespective of the type of couple they were in, reported less marital stability than their husbands did. Both for husbands and for wives, the ALC and MC groups, which did not differ, reported more thoughts and actions concerned with separation/divorce than the NC group did.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

The significant interaction for AC Total Change Desired is presented in Figure 2. Amount of change desired differed among the groups of couples for husbands [F (2,78) = 21.08, $p < .001$] and for wives [F (2,78) = 24.51, $p < .001$]. Newman-Keuls indicated that, for both husbands and wives, the ALC and MC groups (which did not differ) wanted their partners to change more than the NC group did. Comparing spouses within groups showed the ALC husbands desired fewer changes than ALC wives did [F (1,25) = 7.91, $p < .01$], while spouses did not differ in the MC and NC couples.

Insert Figure 3 about here.

Perceptual accuracy. Figure 3 presents the significant interaction for AC Agreements ÷ Disagreements scores which differed across groups for husbands [F (2,78 = 6.27, $p < .01$] but not for wives. Newman-Keuls showed that both ALC and NC husbands (which did not differ) perceived the changes desired by their wives less accurately than MC husbands did, while wives did not differ among the groups. Comparing spouses within groups showed that husbands and wives did not differ in perceptual accuracy for MC and NC couples, while ALC husbands understood ALC wives' needs less well than vice versa [F (1,25) = 4.29, $p < .05$]. Although spouses did not differ significantly in the MC couples, it is interesting that MC husbands perceived their wives more accurately than they were perceived -- a pattern opposite in direction to the ALC couples.

Observational measures of marital interaction

Positive, negative and problem-solving behaviors. The three groups of couples differed on % positive verbal behavior with both ALC and MC couples, which did not differ, showing less positive verbal behavior than their NC counterparts. For nonverbal behavior, wives, irrespective of type of couple, showed more positive and less negative nonverbal behavior than husbands. There were no significant results for negative verbal or problem-solving behaviors.

Insert Figure 4 about here.

Responsibility-avoiding communication style. For the responsibility-avoidance measure (ZDR + EX), the prediction was that ALC husbands would exceed their wives and the husbands in the MC and NC groups. The results showed that husbands exceeded wives in their use of responsibility-avoiding communications but this pattern was not unique to ALC couples. Furthermore, ALC and MC husbands resembled each other and both scored higher than NC husbands, while wives in the three groups did not differ.

For the MICS "Accept Responsibility" (AR) code, the interaction displayed in Figure 4 showed (a) no differences between groups for husbands or wives and (b) ALC husbands with more AR than their wives [F (1,25) = 4.38, $p < .01$], while husbands and wives did not differ in the MC and NC couples.

Struggles for control and dominance patterns. The extent of interruptions, which was used to operationalize struggles for control of the conversation, differed among the three groups of couples. However, Newman-Keuls comparisons among groups of the mean percentage of interruptions (collapsed across sex) showed no differences among ALC (M = 10.73), MC (M = 10.38) and NC (M = 7.40) groups. Given that the Sex and Group by Sex interactions were nonsigni-

ficant in the 2-way ANOVA, an additional one-way ANOVA with couple Group as the independent variable and the interruptions measure as the dependent variable was conducted. Two orthogonal contrasts (Kirk, 1982, pp. 97-98) were evaluated in this ANOVA: ALC with MC and the average of ALC and MC with NC. The ALC vs. MC contrast was not significant while the average of ALC and MC differed significantly from NC [F (1,75) = 9.38, $p < .01$].

No significant effects were found for patterns of dominance.

Discussion

It was predicted that, on a series of marital relationship measures that had discriminated between conflicted and nonconflicted couples in previous studies, (a) couples with an alcoholic husband would resemble maritally-conflicted couples and (b) both alcoholic and conflicted couples would show greater relationship distress than nonconflicted couples. The prediction of greater relationship distress for both alcoholic and conflicted couples than for nonconflicted couples was supported for measures of overall marital satisfaction, marital stability, amount of change desired in the relationship, and percent of positive verbal communication behaviors while discussing a current marital problem. The prediction that alcoholic and maritally-conflicted couples would not differ was supported for these same measures with the exception of husbands' overall marital satisfaction for which alcoholic husbands reported greater marital satisfaction than did their maritally-conflicted counterparts. This latter finding will be discussed below with other findings that resulted from unpredicted interactions. Neither prediction was supported for the other four MICS measures of communication behavior, i.e., positive and negative nonverbal, negative verbal, and problem solving. Perhaps the use of sequential analyses of the couples' interactions (e.g., Margolin & Wampold, 1981) or assessing the effect of drinking alcoholic beverages on the couples' interaction

(e.g., Frankenstein, Hay & Nathan, 1982) would have led to more results on the observational measures of couple communication.

A second set of predictions, based on clinical conceptualizations and prior research comparing alcoholic with normal couples, suggested that alcoholic couples would show a number of characteristics thought to be unique to them to a greater extent than either conflicted or nonconflicted couples. One prediction concerned patterns of dominance and control in the relationship with the expectation that intense struggles for dominance and control and a pattern of wife dominance would characterize the alcoholic couples. The present results did not support this prediction of wife dominance because no significant effects were observed for this variable. The three types of couples did differ on the extent of struggles for control of the conversation, operationalized here as interruptions. However, the prediction of greater struggles for control in ALC than in MC couples was not supported. Rather, both ALC and MC couples had more interruptions than NC couples, suggesting that more interruptions characterize couples with problems and are not unique to alcoholics.

The predictions of less accurate interpersonal perceptions for ALC than for either MC or NC couples were not supported at all for wives who did not differ among the three groups of couples. For husbands, alcoholics understood their wives' desires for change less accurately than MC husbands, as predicted, but the expected differences between ALC and NC husbands was not found. This unpredicted interaction regarding perceptual accuracy is discussed below.

A responsibility-avoiding style of communication by the alcoholic husband was hypothesized. Specifically, it was predicted that the extent of responsibility-avoiding communication (a) would be greater for the ALC than MC or NC husbands and (b) would be greater for ALC husbands than ALC wives but not differ between husbands and wives in the MC and NC couples. When these predic-

tions were applied in opposite direction to a measure of responsibility-accepting communication, no support was found for them; in fact, alcoholics exceeded their wives in responsibility-accepting communication. However, some support was found for the predictions when tested with a measure of responsibility-avoiding communication. The alcoholic husbands showed greater responsibility avoidance than NC husbands as predicted, but, contrary to expectations, did not differ from MC husbands. ALC husbands also were more responsibility-avoiding than ALC wives but this pattern was not unique to ALC couples as expected, because a significant sex effect showed husbands and wives differed similarly irrespective of type of couple. These results suggest that, contrary to predictions, responsibility-avoiding communications by husbands are not unique to alcoholics but rather are a function of the marital discord shared by ALC and MC couples.

Before turning to the unpredicted interactions, let us summarize the present results relative to the predictions tested in this study. First, the present results, similar to findings by Billings et al (1979), suggest that male alcoholics' marriages share much in common with other couples experiencing marital distress not related to alcoholism. Second, for characteristics considered possibly unqiue to ALC marriages, the findings were not very supportive. The predicted greater responsibility-avoiding communication by ALC husbands was not unique to ALC couples but rather was common to both ALC and MC husbands both of whom exceeded NC husbands. Similarly, more interruptions seemed a product of the marital discord shared in common by the ALC and MC couples. It is possible that the measures we used did not adequately operationalize the constructs of perceptual accuracy, dominance and control, or responsibility-avoiding communication. Certainly the present measures and procedures relative to these constructs differed from prior studies. However,

we feel a more likely explanation of both present and prior study results lies in earlier investigators' omission of an MC control group which may have led them to errroneous conclusions about the uniqueness of ALC marriages.

Despite the general pattern of commonality between ALC and MC couples and not much that was specific to ALC couples, the unpredicted interactions revealed a few interesting features that distinguished the ALC couples in the present study. ALC husbands reported greater marital satisfaction and less awareness of their wives' desires for change than MC husbands did. ALC husbands also reported greater relationship satisfaction, fewer desires for change, and less awareness of partner-desired changes than their wives did. Thus, on three of four self-report measures ALC husbands described their marriages in less negative terms than did their wives, and this pattern of differing perceptions of the relationship was not generally found in the MC and NC couples.

The positive bias of the male alcoholic's view of his marriage discovered in the unpredicted interactions makes sense clinically and can be explained in a number of ways. Perhaps the alcoholic's denial and his having been at least partially anesthetized by alcohol to the complaints and dissatisfactions of his wife contribute to his being less aware of marital problems than his wife and than husbands in troubled marriages where alcohol is not a problem. Another possible explanation is that many alcoholics' wives stop sharing their concerns with their husbands because they learn that talking to a drinking alcoholic is fruitless, and they fear upsetting the alcoholic by talking about problems when he is not drinking. Whatever the cause of these differing perceptions of the marriage, they have implications for marital therapy with male alcoholics and their wives. The husband may enter marital therapy reluctantly and do so primarily to placate the wife (O'Farrell, Kleinke, Logan & Cutter, 1985). Once in

therapy, the alcoholic may feel he has done enough by stopping drinking and feel resentful that the wife wants additional changes. This can lead to a one-sided focus at the start of therapy on the wife's anger at the husband's past drinking and his current lack of appreciation of her needs. Left unchallenged by the therapist, such a focus can lead to a relapse or to unproductive marital therapy. Alcoholics' scores on the self-report measures, although showing less conflict than their wives' scores did, were in the range of marital distress, suggesting that a more balanced therapy focus can be obtained by the therapist who elicits the alcoholic's desire for change in the relationship.

Future studies need to replicate the present results, especially the unpredicted interactions and the lack of uniqueness of the alcoholics' marriages. In considering these results it must be remembered that the alcoholics had sought treatment for alcoholism and an evaluation for possible marital therapy. Both the alcoholics and conflicted couples sought help at a VA. Finally, the data presented were gathered in a controlled setting when the alcoholic was not drinking and had been abstinent at least a few weeks. Thus, only future studies can tell to what extent the present results generalize to other populations of alcoholics and to behavior in the natural environment.

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Author Note

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Table 1. Demographic Data for Three Groups of Couples

Variable	ALC Couples	MC Couples	NC Couples
Years married			
M (*SD*)	15.12 (10.64)	15.22 (10.84)	15.50 (8.71)
Range	1-33	2-35	4-34
Age husband			
M (*SD*)	41.85 (9.85)	43.00 (11.01)	40.31 (9.76)
Range	28-58	21-58	26-58
Age wife			
M (*SD*)	40.04 (10.59)	39.92 (10.80)	36.62 (8.64)
Range	19-58	24-57	23-54
Education husband[a]			
M (*SD*)	13.35 (2.00)	14.40 (2.97)	13.69 (2.59)
Range	11-17	8-21	8-18
Education wife[a]			
M (*SD*)	12.69 (1.59)	13.25 (2.02)	13.50 (2.21)
Range	10-16	10-17	12-18
Number of children			
M (*SD*)	3.04 (1.80)	3.46 (1.58)	2.46 (1.30)
Range	0-7	0-6	0-5

Note. ALC couples are couples with an alcoholic husband. MC couples are maritally conflicted couples with neither spouse an alcoholic. NC couples are nonconflicted couples with neither spouse an alcoholic.

[a]Education is years of schooling completed.

Table 2. Mean Scores for Three Groups of Couples for Four Self-Report Marital Relationship Measures and Results of Multivariate and Univariate ANOVA's

	Alcoholic		Conflicted		Happy		F		
Variable	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Group	Sex	Group by Sex
Multivariate effects							20.68***	5.94***	2.46*
Univariate effects									
MAT[a]	89.85 (26.18)	78.81 (26.69)	70.04 (20.76)	72.31 (18.18)	124.35 (13.25)	129.81 (11.39)	71.65***	0.20	4.18*
MSI[b]	2.88 (2.70)	4.27 (3.44)	3.69 (2.74)	4.69 (3.37)	0.35 (0.74)	0.46 (0.71)	28.90***	4.87*	0.99
AC-Total Change[c]	20.62 (10.92)	34.27 (14.26)	23.11 (10.02)	28.46 (13.88)	8.58 (5.80)	11.92 (7.67)	34.45***	21.57***	3.87*
AC Agreements + Disagreements[d]	1.53 (1.21)	3.00 (3.35)	3.42 (4.28)	1.94 (1.32)	0.95 (1.32)	1.65 (2.69)	3.84	0.30	4.25*

Note. Scores in parentheses are standard deviations.

[a]For MAT (on which high scores indicate better adjustment), comparisons between groups showed (a) for husbands (H), ALCH > MCH < NCH and ALCH < NCH; (b) for wives (W), ALCW = MCW < NCW and ALCW < NWC. Within groups: for ALC, H > W; for MC, H = W; for NC, H < W.

[b]For MSI (higher scores show worse adjustment), between groups (a) ALCH = MCH > NCH and ALCH > NCH; (b) ALCW = MCW > NCW, and ALCW > NCW.

[c]For AC-Total Change, between groups (a) ALCH = MCH > NCH and ALCH > NCH; (b) ALCW = MCW > NCW and ALCW > NCW. Within groups: for ALC, H < W; for MC, H = W; for NC, H = W.

[d]For AC Agreements + Disagreements, between groups (a) ALCH < MCH > NCH and ALCH = NCH; (b) ALCW = MCW = NCW and ALCW = NCW. Within groups: for ALC, H $\leq$ W; for MC, H = W; for NC, H = W.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3. Mean Scores for Three Groups of Couples for Nine Observational Variables and Results of Multivariate and Univariate ANOVA's

	Alcoholic		Conflicted		Happy		F		
Variable	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Group	Sex	Group by Sex
Multivariate effects							5.25***	2.97**	1.80*
Univariate effects									
% Positive Verbal[a]	3.48 (2.85)	3.30 (2.69)	4.39 (3.55)	4.23 (3.52)	8.86 (6.03)	9.06 (8.04)	19.88***	0.00	0.02
% Positive Nonverbal	20.51 (10.26)	29.29 (10.60)	26.01 (10.80)	28.91 (12.05)	24.36 (11.36)	26.11 (9.59)	0.63	10.46**	2.47
% Negative Verbal	6.31 (6.62)	5.28 (5.85)	5.89 (5.71)	6.26 (5.55)	2.49 (2.66)	4.72 (4.90)	2.20	0.76	2.46
% Negative Nonverbal	7.06 (9.03)	3.20 (5.67)	4.96 (8.74)	3.44 (6.43)	6.34 (7.78)	3.31 (4.51)	0.20	6.90**	0.41
% Problem Solving	5.45 (4.77)	4.18 (5.12)	6.48 (5.40)	8.04 (5.68)	5.26 (4.12)	5.61 (4.43)	2.66	0.10	1.51
% DR & EX[b]	1.11 (1.53)	0.28 (0.63)	1.11 (2.10)	0.47 (0.97)	0.10 (0.37)	0.16 (0.49)	5.45**	5.32*	1.81
% AR[c]	1.55 (2.26)	0.37 (0.66)	0.68 (1.09)	1.33 (2.04)	0.68 (1.13)	0.51 (1.18)	1.06	1.03	5.37**

Table 3 - continued

	Alcoholic		Conflicted		Happy		F		
Variable	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Group	Sex	Group by Sex
% Interruptions	11.25 (5.69)	10.21 (6.65)	9.82 (5.84)	10.95 (5.67)	7.38 (4.89)	7.42 (4.57)	3.96*	0.00	0.83
% Control Outcome of Interruptions	50.97 (14.10)	49.03 (14.10)	46.48 (19.10)	53.52 (19.10)	53.37 (25.10)	46.63 (25.10)	0.02	0.01	0.80

Note. Scores in parentheses are standard deviations.

[a]For MICS % Positive Verbal, comparison between groups showed: ALC = MC < NC and ALC < NC.

[b]For MICS % DR & EX, comparisons between groups showed (a) ALCH = MCH > NCH and ALCH > NCH; (b) ALCW = MCW = NCW and ALCW = NCW.

[c]For MICS % AR, between groups (a) ALCH = MCH = NCH and ALCH = NCH; (b) ALCW = MCW = NCW and ALCW = NCW. Within groups: for ALC, H > W; for MC, H = W; for NC, H = W.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Mean Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test scores in three types of couples (H = husbands, W = wives; ALC = couples with an alcoholic husband, MC = maritally conflicted couples with neither spouse alcoholic, NC = non-conflicted couples with neither spouse alcoholic).

Figure 2. Mean AC Total Change Desired scores in three types of couples (H = husbands, W = wives; ALC = couples with an alcoholic husband, MC = maritally conflicted couples with neither spouse alcoholic, NC = non-conflicted couples with neither spouse alcoholic).

Figure 3. Mean AC Agreements + Disagreements scores in three types of couples (H = husbands, W = wives; ALC = couples with an alcoholic husband, MC = maritally conflicted couples with neither spouse alcoholic, NC = non-conflicted couples with neither spouse alcoholic).

Figure 4. Mean MICS Percent "Accept Responsibility" scores in three types of couples (Scores are multiplied by 10; H = husbands, W = wives; ALC = couples with an alcoholic husband, MC = maritally conflicted couples with neither spouse alcoholic, NC = non-conflicted couples with neither spouse alcoholic).

FIGURE 1

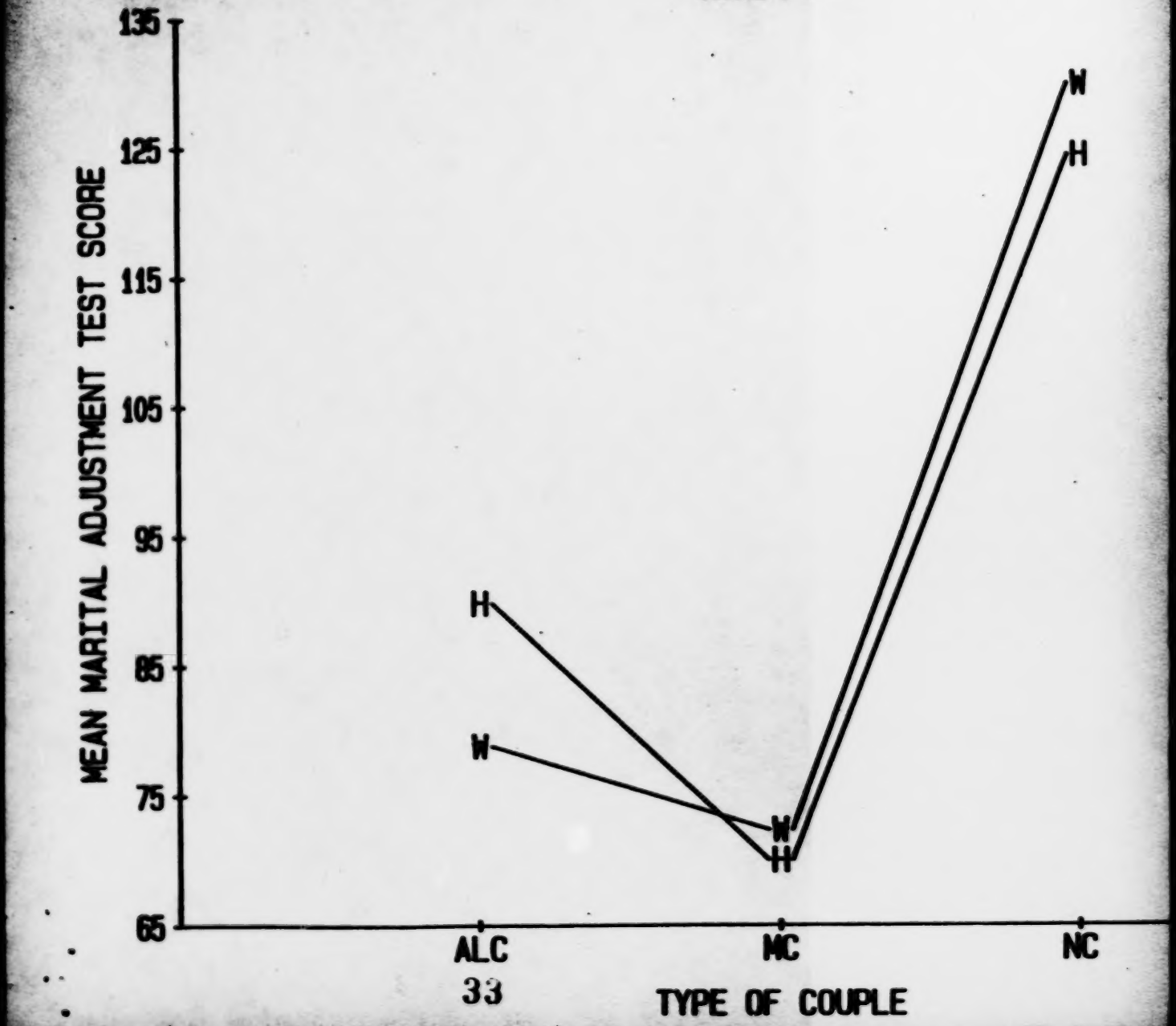

MEAN MARITAL ADJUSTMENT TEST SCORE
135
125
115
105
95
85
75
65
H
W
W
H
W
H
ALC
MC
NC
TYPE OF COUPLE

FIGURE 2

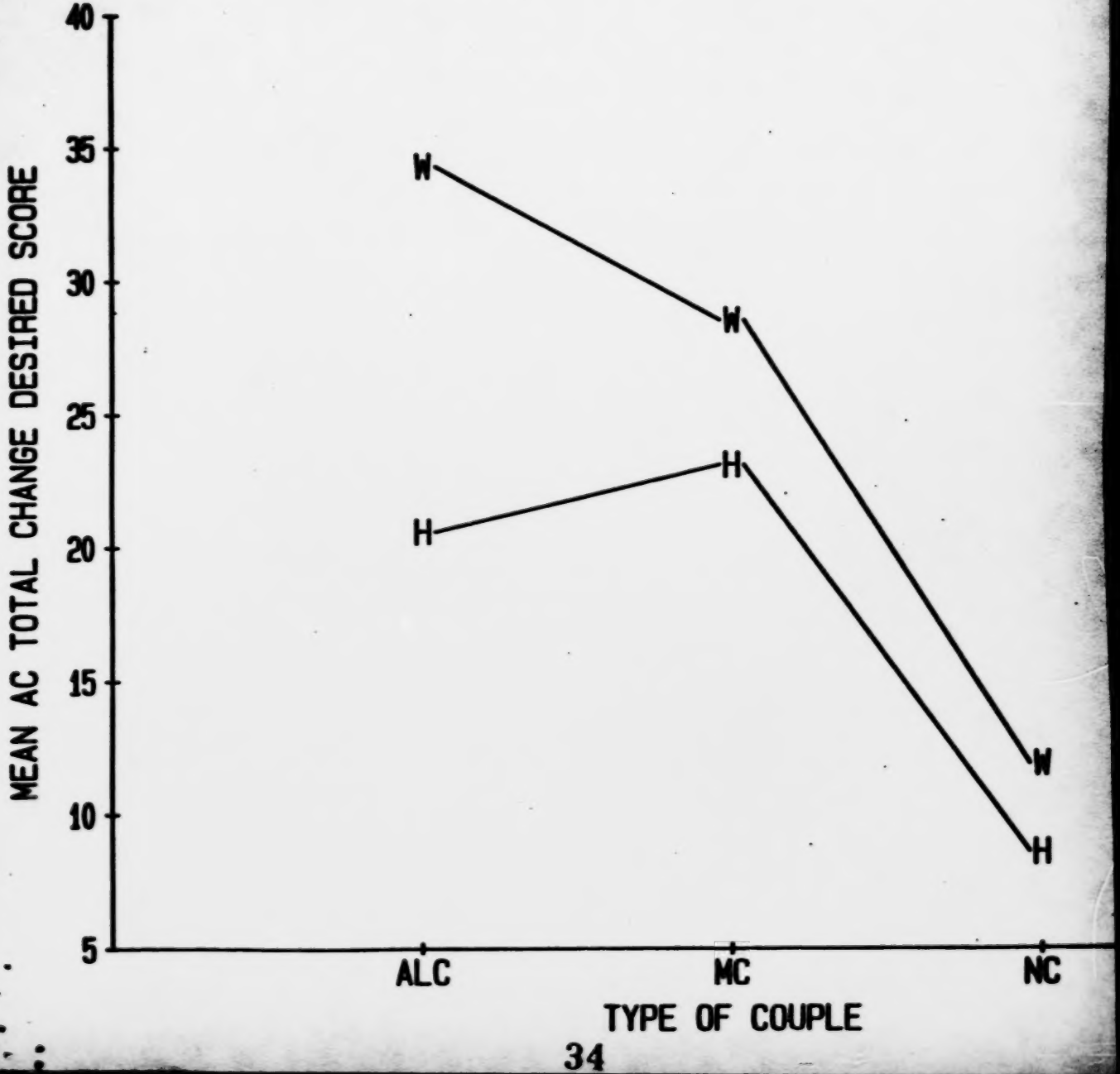

MEAN AC TOTAL CHANGE DESIRED SCORE
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
W
W
W
H
H
H
ALC
MC
NC
TYPE OF COUPLE

FIGURE 3

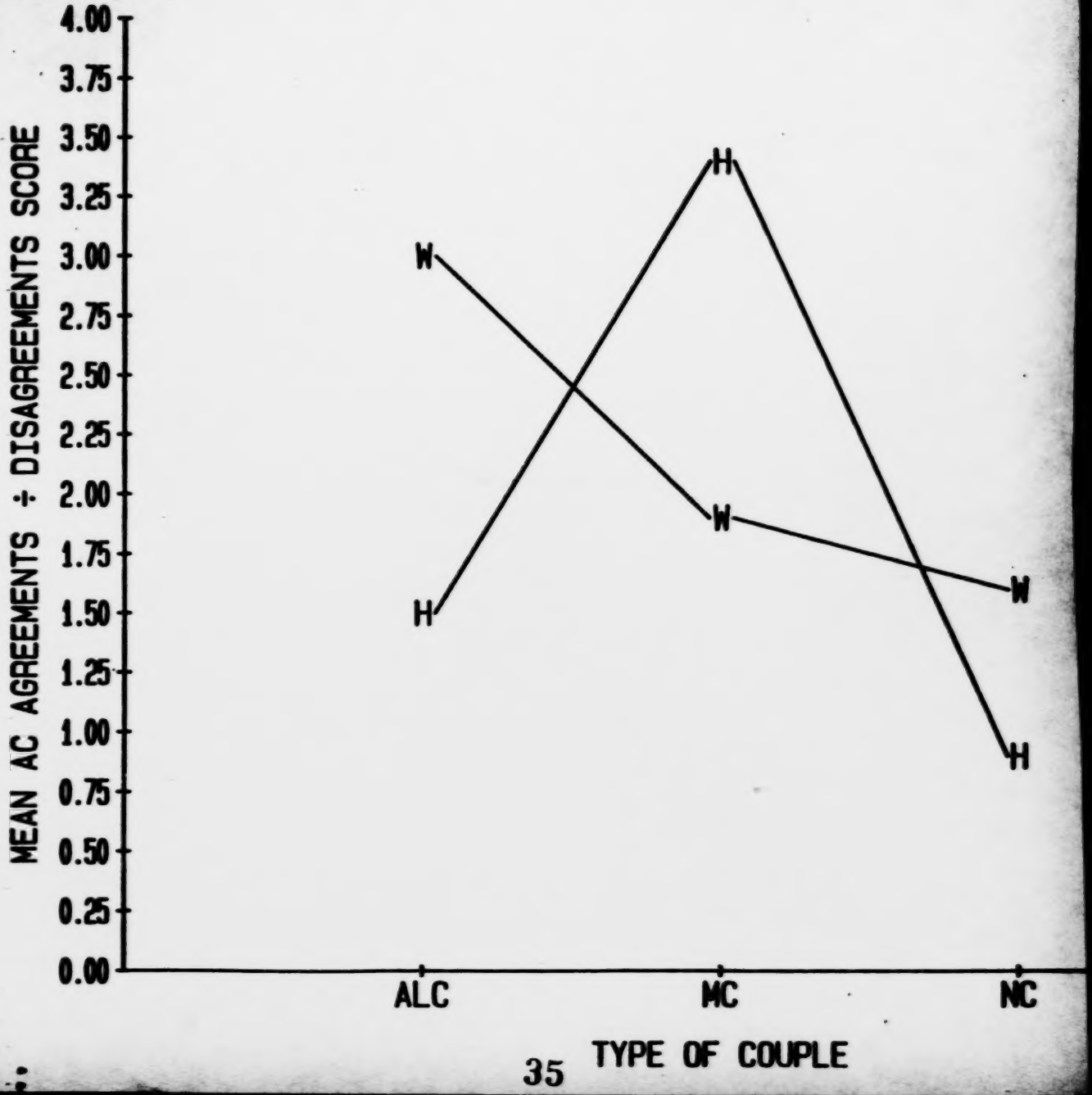
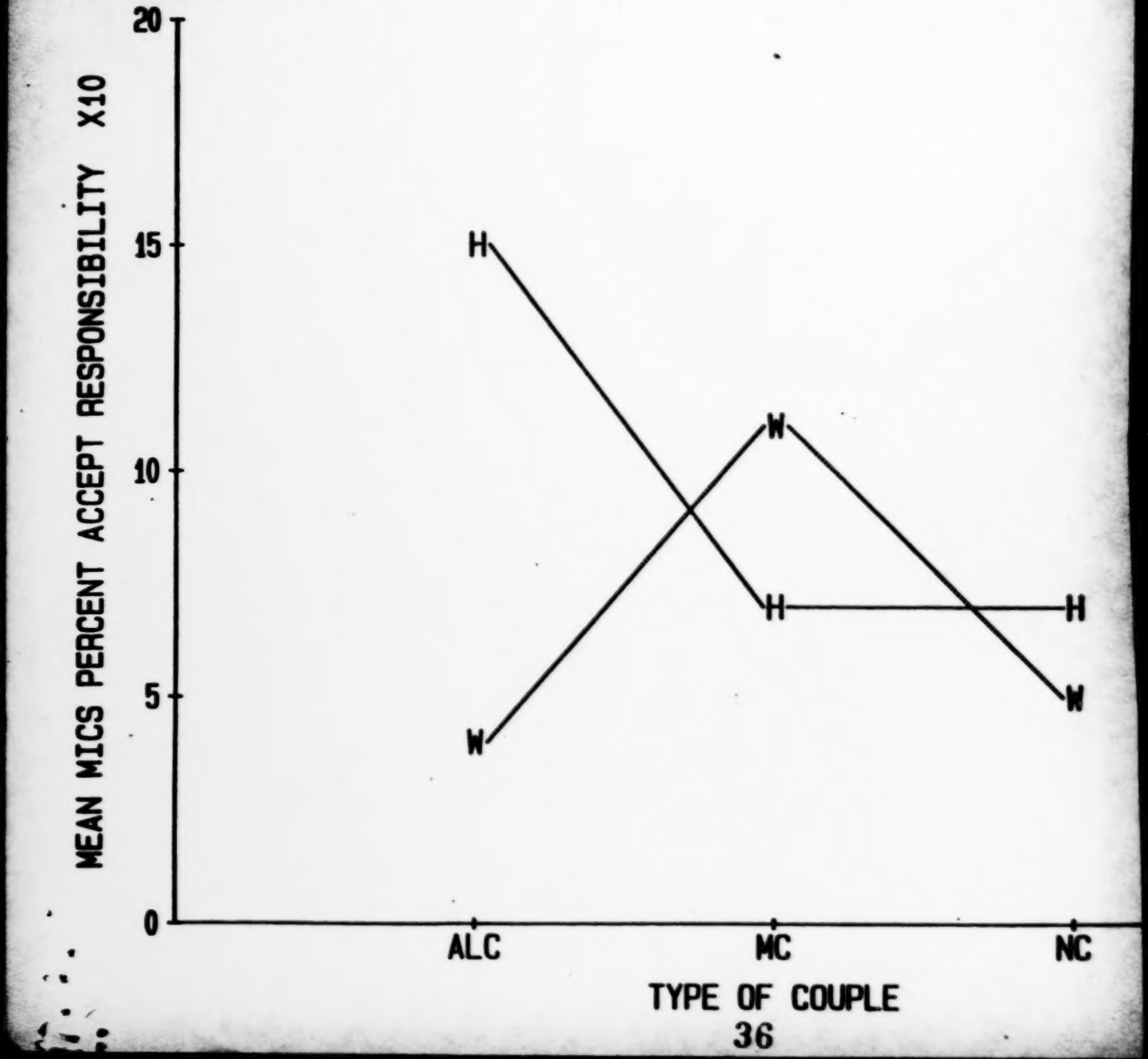

MEAN AC AGREEMENTS ÷ DISAGREEMENTS SCORE
4.00
3.75
3.50
3.25
3.00
2.75
2.50
2.25
2.00
1.75
1.50
1.25
1.00
0.75
0.50
0.25
0.00
W
H
W
H
W
H
ALC
MC
NC
TYPE OF COUPLE

FIGURE 4


MEAN MICS PERCENT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY X10
20
15
10
5
0
H
W
W
H
H
W
ALC
MC
NC
TYPE OF COUPLE